

## **Dengue Outbreak Declared 2 February 2021**

The government is urging the public to help reduce the number of mosquitos in the wake of confirmation of 8 Dengue cases. Last week 16 samples were sent to New Zealand LabPlus for verification. So far, 9 of these samples have come back with 8 of those tests positive for Dengue Type-2 and one negative result.

Commenting from Pukapuka this afternoon Prime Minister Brown asked Te Marae Ora Public Health to instigate a special tutaka – not dissimilar to Operation Namu that took place on Rarotonga last April.

“I’ve asked officials to coordinate an island wide operation tasked with cleaning out potential dengue sites and slashing areas of risk in conjunction with the spraying programme. It’s really important we get on top of this latest outbreak as soon as we can, first on Rarotonga, and then the Pa Enuā.”

“Numbers of presumed cases for this year are likely to rise above last year’s cases unless we act promptly” the Prime Minister said.

The hot spots started around Titikaveka and Ngatangia but have now spread around the villages of Arorangi, Tereora to Pokoinu, Tupapa and Matavera.

As per Te Marae Ora’s Dengue Protocol, the threshold of 5 cases has been reached therefore prompting the Secretary of Health, Mr Bob Williams to declare an outbreak.

“Whilst we have confirmation of 8 cases, the number of infected people exceeds this number. Last year there were just over 140 presumed cases. Since the beginning of 2021 Te Marae Ora estimates that at least 60 people on Rarotonga are likely to have or have recently recovered from dengue” Mr Williams said.

In addition, a Cook Islands student who travelled back to Auckland recently and has tested positive for Dengue has been admitted to hospital in Auckland as a precaution, isolating the person from others.

Dengue is a mosquito-borne viral infection that causes a flu-like illness which can occasionally develop into severe illness. It develops in tropical and sub-tropical climates particularly in urban and semi-urban areas. The daytime bites of infected female mosquitoes can transmit the virus to humans.

Symptoms may include fever, headache, muscle and joint pains, nausea, vomiting, swollen glands, and pain behind the eyes. Severe dengue includes symptoms such as rash, mild

bleeding in the nose or gums, and easy bruising. While there is no specific treatment for dengue, early detection and seeking proper medical care lowers fatality rates to below one per cent.

Public Health officials are currently implementing a number of measures to keep the dengue outbreak under control. Members of the public can do their part by:

- Avoiding mosquito bites during the daytime - particularly at dusk and dawn - by covering up, applying insect repellent diligently throughout the day, and keeping mosquito coils lit around the house.
- If you develop fever, headache, pain behind the eyes, muscle or bone aches and pains, or you feel unwell, seek urgent medical advice. Dengue can make you very sick.

Members of the public are being asked to clear up their sections by removing overgrown vegetation and disposing water-retaining containers to prevent a further influx of mosquitos.

Public health officials said a 100-400 metre radius of cleared vegetation around homes is required to reduce breeding and resting environments for mosquitos.

Last week public health officials in Rarotonga were able to conduct peri-focal spraying around Tepuka-Nikao; Inave, Arorangi; Tikioki-Titikaveka.

Officials also recommend the use of mosquito bed nets and installing window screens on homes.

The Ministry of Health advises members of the public to see a doctor if they develop fever, experience headaches or nausea, feel pain behind the eyes, or suffer from muscle aches.

“Our people cannot be too cautious when it comes to mosquitos,” said Mr Williams.

“Keeping sections clear of overgrowth and preventing mosquito bites will assist government efforts to reduce the number of mosquitos and prevent further spreading of dengue fever.”

For Health-related questions or concerns please visit [www.health.gov.ck](http://www.health.gov.ck) or contact Public Health on 29110 during office hours or 54885 and 54008 after hours.

#### Additional information:

About half of the world's population is at risk of getting dengue fever, and that while no one can be absolutely sure in recent times an estimated 390 million have on an annual basis. In fact, the number could be much higher than that because many people don't present themselves to the health authorities or they might be mis-diagnosed.

Only the female bites humans and draws blood, the male of the species lives on fruit. And unlike most other mosquitos, these bite during the day not at night and tend to be very active

around dusk and in the early morning. Another of the Aedes family can spread dengue too, but because it is hardier and can live in cooler climates it tends to be more active in places like Europe.

Having drawn the blood of an infected person, the female will go on and infect each person she subsequently bites for the remainder of her life, which can last about a fortnight to a month. In that time, she never travels more than about 500 meters.

The symptoms can be severe and include headaches, pain in muscles and joints, vomiting, bleeding gums with very high temperatures which can lead to seizures. Temperature and blood cell counts are closely watched and treatment often pretty basic. For example, the only real way to get your temp down is to sit under a cold shower; often several times a day.

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